

UNITED STATES  
CONSULATE GENERAL  
GUANGZHOU, CHINA



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## A NEW CONSULATE FOR A NEW ERA

The new United States Consulate General in Guangzhou, China represents a new era in the design of diplomatic platforms. When the State Department's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) acquired the site in 2001, the choice reflected a sense of optimism. The 7.4-acre property filled almost a full city block about two miles east of the traditional city center. It was wide open fields—rice paddies and fish farms. But it wasn't to stay that way for long—the site was part of a master plan known as Pearl River New Town. The rapid growth of Chinese cities in the 21st century is historically unprecedented. By the time the facility opened in 2013, it was surrounded by block after block of 40-story—and taller—structures. The architecturally ambitious Guangzhou Opera House was diagonally across the street and southern China's new answer to Paris' emblematic Eiffel Tower, the Canton Tower, rose just across the Pearl River.

Things had, in a word, changed.

OBO's interest in Excellence began with the recognition that American design expertise can be a vital part of the State Department's mission to develop relationships with foreign counterparts. The choice of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP (SOM) as the architect for the Guangzhou Consulate reflected a commitment to this mission. The firm has received more than 1,700 awards for design and innovation over 75 years of practice and has extensive experience throughout China over the past several decades. SOM designed the award-winning

Looking southeast across the  
Pearl River to Guangzhou







United States Embassy in Beijing and four other projects within a short distance of the new Consulate in Guangzhou—the Pearl River Tower a few blocks north, the Kingold Group Zhujiang New Town F1-1, the Agile Corporation Headquarters Tower and the Poly Real Estate Headquarters, which is east along the Pearl River.

SOM Design Partner Craig Hartman, FAIA, was very taken by Guangzhou's character as he strolled the streets of the city with his San Francisco-based team. The city is the third largest in China with roughly 15 million residents and is the capital of Guangdong province. Located on the Pearl River, the city is about 75 miles northwest of Hong Kong and has a sub-tropical climate. The "Lingnan" culture of Guangdong and the surrounding provinces of southeastern China stresses the integration of nature, informal layout, open spaces for gathering, weather protection, and architectural diversity. "Guangzhou is quite unique," Hartman says. "While Beijing is formal and monumental, Guangzhou is very much about river culture. It's not uncommon for it to be rainy and sunny three or four times a day. There's a constant flux between bright skies and downpours."

"The relationship between the natural and urban landscape is very powerful," Hartman explains. "It is a fluid relationship between the water and soft land forms—and it extends to the human culture, a charming informality. The people are friendly and open and generous."

*"This facility fulfills goals that are now being put in place on a wider range of projects. Its role as a precursor and a test ground for a lot of things that people want to see in our new buildings can't be understated."*

*Lydia Muniz, Director, OBO*

## ESTABLISHING NEW STANDARDS

In 2010, OBO Director Lydia Muniz redirected OBO's focus from a Standard Embassy Design to an Excellence approach which would ensure that the design and construction of U.S. diplomatic facilities met all security and safety standards as well as appropriately represent the U.S. government to the host nation. Embassies and consulates would be secure, sustainable and responsive to the local environments in which they were built.

While the Consulate General project was initiated prior to the formal institution of OBO's Excellence in Diplomatic Facilities initiative, OBO determined that the Guangzhou Consulate General program requirements were so unique that the standard design used for most embassies and consulates at the time could not be applied.

Much of SOM's early design effort was focused on conceptualizing the project as a work of architecture, including ways to rethink and adapt some of the standard components they were asked to work with in a manner appropriate for Guangzhou. There were several vestiges of an earlier era in consulate design that had to be overcome. "I had several conversations with Craig Hartman about the importance of the design," Muniz recalls. "He and SOM realized they had a client who was very interested in design innovation."

The Consulate Courtyard at night







*"It was very important to be a presence representing the United States right in the heart of the city."*

*Lydia Muniz, Director, OBO*

One of SOM's initiatives was to demonstrate American leadership in environmental sustainability, beginning with passive strategies to reduce consumption, which proved challenging when adapting the standard components. Originally designed to be vertical, Hartman turned the standard windows on their sides to create long, horizontal and deeply recessed fenestration that provides shade in the sub-tropical locale.

"The core values that are expressed in the Guiding Principles for OBO's Excellence initiative grew out of projects like Guangzhou," says Casey Jones, Deputy Director. "I would call it an early test case of a new way to approach diplomatic design. When I look at the principles, I see lots of examples where Guangzhou helped us get to a better place."

"One of the great things that the United States produces and exports is design," Jones continues. Noting that diplomatic facilities of the 1950s and 1960s still serve as examples of the most innovative design explorations of mid-century modern architecture, he positions the State Department's current Excellence program as its logical successor.

View from east through  
Consulate visitor entrance



## OF THE PLACE, OF THE LANDSCAPE

*“Guangzhou is in the low-lying Pearl River Delta, an area already beginning to see the effects of sea level rise. We have designed the site and the buildings to use natural systems, retaining and cleansing storm water on site, to alleviate this site’s impact on the city’s infrastructure and avoid contributing pollution to the Pearl River.”*

*Craig Hartman, FAIA  
Design Partner, SOM*

Hartman intended the Consulate General to represent American values while respecting Guangzhou’s physical and cultural landscape. Set within the heart of Guangzhou’s bustling Pearl River New Town neighborhood, the Consulate General campus is a garden oasis surrounded by skyscrapers. The aim was to create buildings and grounds that would be environmentally sustainable and respect Lingnan culture, avoiding monumentality and formality. The site and buildings use natural systems to retain and cleanse storm water on site.

The buildings use natural, locally sourced materials and the architectural forms reflect the soft forms of Guangzhou’s ancient ecology, shedding water directly into the Consulate campus’ bioswales and riparian landscape.

The Consulate General consists of seven individual structures across the site. The dominant structure is a four-story office building that defines the eastern edge of the block. It is supported by three single-story pavilions that provide secure entry to the compound—one on the eastern edge for the public, one at the southeast corner for diplomatic visitors and one on the western edge for staff and services. Three other buildings at the center of the campus provide essential support for the U.S. Government’s operations.

The main office building’s exterior is sheathed in local stone and the soft edges of the building, including an outward cant to its eastern façade that deflects the prevailing cooling breeze onto the entry plaza, are all references to its particular place.

Looking northwest toward the Consulate visitor’s entrance. Storm water runoff from building’s site runs to the Consulate bioswales, shown in foreground.





*"The compound's architectural ethos is formed around a clear commitment to environmental sustainability that includes the extensive use of local materials and with those materials a commitment to local traditions of craft in their deployment."*

*Craig Hartman, FAIA, Design Partner, SOM*

"Metaphorically, it's as if a sheet of the stone that was under the site was lifted up and bent, creating a soft building form," Hartman says. "The form is unlike a typical roof that collects water and brings it down through the building into the city storm sewer. We've designed it so we don't divert any rainwater whatsoever. Rather, we allow the rain to roll off the soft edge of the building into the landscape where it is cleansed and slowly percolates into the natural aquifer."

The landscape was designed by the Tom Leader Studio in close collaboration with SOM. The design reinforces the project's overall intentions for civic presence, security and sustainability. Hartman and Leader brought together all elements of the landscape, architecture and supporting entourage in a tapestry that connects the city sidewalk, the campus perimeter, trees, benches, the main interior plaza and the interior of the Consulate's Great Hall. The result visually and metaphorically connects Guangzhou's public realm with the Consulate's inner realm.

Landscape at the Consulate General is used for functional and sustainable purposes but also to reinforce the cultural connection to the city and Guangdong Province. It is deployed in traditional ways to shade public space and reduce the impact of storm surges but also in new ways — such as living roofs—to reduce the heat island effect of the overall complex.









## THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

*"This is the face of the U.S. government for Guangdong Province and southern China. We wanted to architecturally relate to this new town, this new reality of what China was becoming and the new economic relationship between the U.S. and this part of China."*

*Mark Flemming, Architect and Design Manager, OBO*

The campus is designed to emphasize the physical and visual connection between the Consulate General's gardens, public art and its principal interior public space. These connections are intended to convey an open, hospitable relationship between the American and Chinese people.

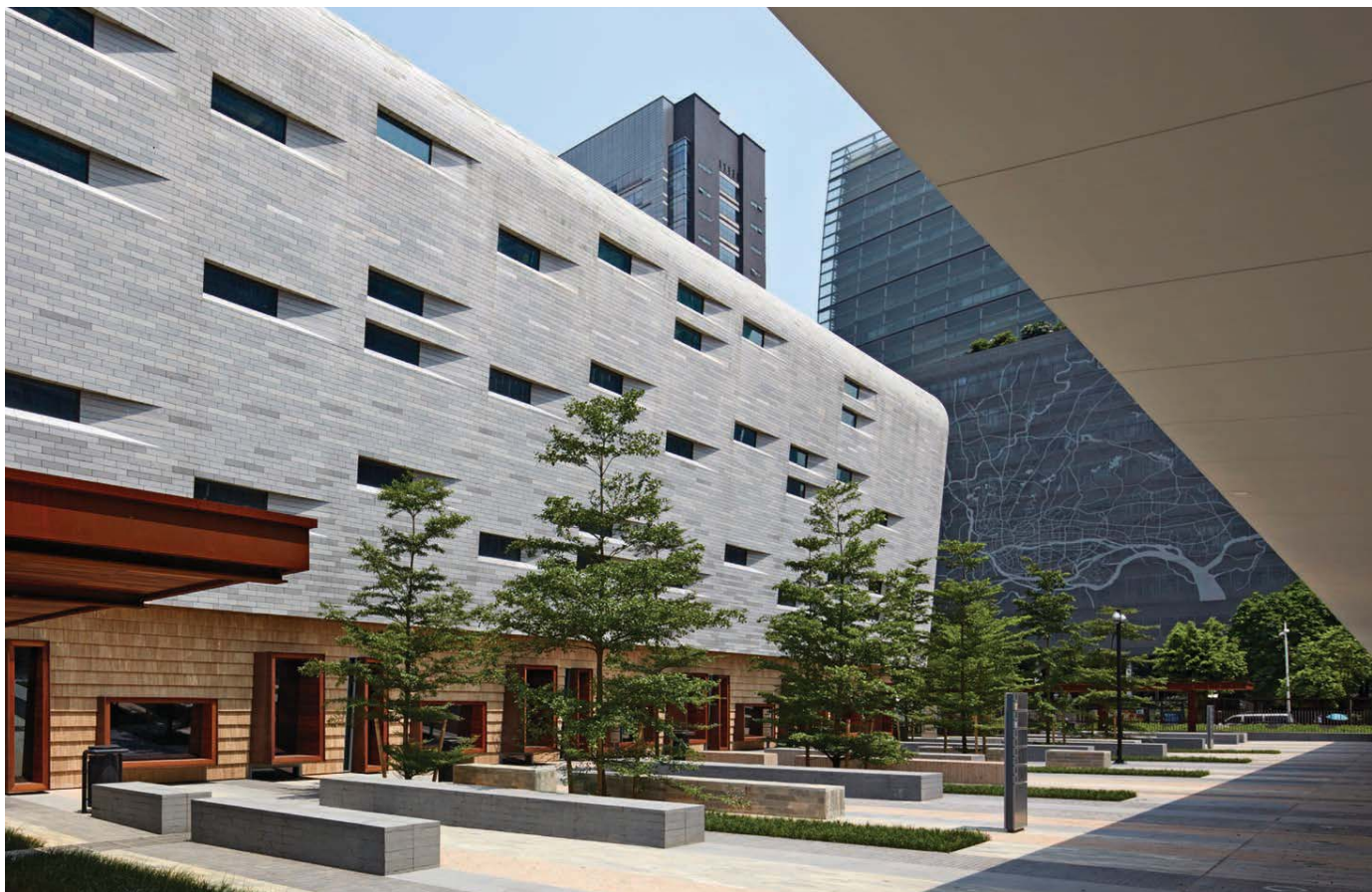
All public visitors to any American diplomatic facility must first pass through a physical screening facility—a consulate access point. Typically, this process has been treated as a necessary inconvenience, housed within a nondescript enclosure. This access point is, however, the first building encountered by every public visitor. It is the only occupied building that can be physically located directly on the perimeter, at the edge of the sidewalk.

At the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, Hartman and colleagues first advanced the idea that these access points should be architecturally considered and consciously engage the urban public realm. In Guangzhou, this idea is taken to a new level as a civic work of architecture, providing a generous, welcoming entry of great transparency and views directly to the gardens and plaza within.

Public visitors to the complex enter through a pavilion at the east edge of the site. In this low-lying structure security personnel conduct the required clearances under an elegant and efficient enclosure that is wrapped in earthen-hued Corten steel. A planted green roof helps with site water mitigation and provides a lush appearance for its crown. Through both aesthetics and clearly defined entry paths, the pavilions provide an appropriately stately, yet friendly, first impression.

View through the Consular Access Compound into the Consular Courtyard from Huaxia Road





*"What you notice most are the finishes of hand-placed stonework throughout that are beautifully executed. This is especially so in the Consular garden and Great Hall where the elegant patterning of the pavers show the handiwork of the local Chinese craft."*

*Phillip Louh, Project Director, Department of State, OBO*

American visitors are directed to the north end of the Consulate General building where they can enter and ascend to the second floor service area via the ceremonial stair or glass elevator. Chinese visitors queue within the Consular Courtyard, a paved space between the entry pavilion and the Consulate General building. Protected from sunshine by a canopy of trees, the surface of the outdoor space is paved with an intricate pattern of local and recycled masonry that carries into the Main Hall. Prevailing breezes in Guangzhou are from the east—and the canted Chancery façade on this side captures the wind and funnels it into this primary exterior space. "It's a combination of shelter, shade and also capturing the prevailing breeze to help make that space comfortable," Hartman says.

The four-story stone façade is composed of local granite with variegated colors. The mixture of dark and light grays subtly changes from predominantly dark at the base to lighter at the top until it becomes the roof. When it turns over to the roof, it becomes white so that it can reflect the rays of the sun and mitigate the heat island effect common to urban buildings. "We clad the buildings in granite and other stone that is relatively inexpensive in China, but it has durability," says Mark Flemming, OBO Architect and Design Manager. "It represents the solidity and permanence to the relationship between the U.S. and the Chinese people. As you look at the stone, you can see the intricacy of the stonework on the façades and in the pavements—and that's local, Chinese craftsmanship."





## REPRESENTING AMERICA

*"We have used visual and spatial means to give a sense of connection between the public realm and the Consulate's public mission—and by extension, a sense of American civic generosity within one of China's largest cities. This can be most visibly seen in the connection between the public street entry, the Consulate Plaza and the interior Great Hall."*

Craig Hartman, FAIA  
Design Partner, SOM

The United States Consulate General in Guangzhou is unique among American consular facilities because of the tremendous volume of customers who use its services. The most common service is provided within the Great Hall at "teller windows," where a U.S. Foreign Service Officer can securely and privately interview a Chinese national who is applying for a non-immigrant visa, a visitor visa or an immigrant visa. "We have 67 of those in this consulate, which is pretty astonishing," says Lloyd Myhre, Project Manager. "Most places will have five or ten." The Guangzhou windows handle thousands of people each week.

Myhre explains one reason for the high volume. "This is the one place in China where Chinese nationals can go to apply for immigrant visas to the United States."

The overall shape of the double-height space mimics the soft form of the building and the interior is wrapped by a horizontally slatted wood screen. Teller windows are arrayed along the west wall—their individual service areas demarked by stone surrounds that offer each visitor a sense of privacy with discrete dignity. The opposite wall is punctuated by wood-lined Corten steel "lantern boxes," as Hartman calls them. These distinctive architectural elements provide natural light as well as a strong visual connection to the Consular Garden. The lanterns correspond to patterns in the stone pavement that stretch between the interior and exterior public space. "When you're standing inside the building looking through a lantern, your eye goes into direct alignment with the pavement, tracking the landscape element to the street and vice versa," Hartman says.

Customers queue in the Consulate's two-story Great Hall. 67 teller windows expedite service.





*"The new Consulate General incorporates superior design innovations, without sacrificing essential security requirements. This unique synergy is the result of highly skilled and dedicated professionals working in close collaboration from design inception through construction and commissioning."*

*Joseph Toussaint, Managing Director, Program Development, Coordination, and Support, OBO*

Services for American citizens are provided on the second floor, accessed via a ceremonial stair or glass elevator in the Main Hall. The room's furnishings are movable to allow the space to be used for community and staff meetings or public receptions. Heather Townsend, OBO Deputy Director and Career Foreign Service Officer, finds the Main Consular Hall inspiring: "This is absolutely unique—the attention that's been paid to the aesthetics and to the experience. The materials, the height, the lanterns and the lighting, it's clearly very efficient. The functionality has not been sacrificed for the aesthetics, but it doesn't appear institutional."

Muniz recalls, "I spent time talking with Craig and SOM about what a consular section means. It's the gateway to America. This is the first place visitors go. It's the beginning of their experience. It has to convey our values of openness, sustainability, excellence. It says something about who we are. We're a country that wants to pursue excellence at every level."

Opposite: Courtyard view of lantern boxes  
Above: View east from the Great Hall across the Consular Courtyard to Huaxia Road



*"Guangzhou is one of the busiest  
visa-issuing consulates in the world.  
A lot of people from a very important  
U.S. partner, China, are getting  
their first view of the United States  
here. It's important this building  
be representative of who and  
what we are as a country."*

*Heather Townsend  
Deputy Director, OBO*







## ART

*"This is the first time Art in Embassies has been able to include the work of three major video artists in a permanent collection... Doug Aitken, Jennifer Steinkamp, and the grandfather of video, Bill Viola. It is an exciting, logistically challenging, and worthy endeavor."*

*Virginia Shore, Chief Curator  
Art in Embassies, OBO*

As a visible expression of the two countries' cultures and shared interests, OBO's Office of Art in Embassies (AIE) has created a permanent art collection for the Consulate General. The objective in Guangzhou, as with all collections AIE curates for new buildings, is to connect two countries culturally and have the art integrate fully with the building's design. "We research and work with host country artists and U.S. artists in selecting and commissioning site-specific works that highlight commonalities and differences, and engage staff and visitors in a cross-cultural dialogue," explains Art in Embassies Chief Curator Virginia Shore.

"Art and technology are areas that both Chinese and American artists are currently exploring," Shore says—an insight that helped her select this particular focus for the collection. "Experiments in video art and photography bring new life to the spaces. They encourage interaction and inspire audiences." The main U.S. pieces in the interior include: Doug Aitken's light box, *New Horizon*, in the lobby; a video installation by American artist Jennifer Steinkamp in the south end of the Main Hall; and a video, *Old Oak*, by artist Bill Viola in the Immigrant Visa Hall.

Jennifer Steinkamp's video installation, *Orbit*, projected on the south wall of the Great Hall



Opposite Page: Doug Aitken, *New Horizon*  
 Above Top: Liu Zheng, *Untitled, New Photo-Ten Years*  
 Above Bottom: Zhao Liang, *Untitled, New Photo-Ten Years*  
 Above Right: Jin Yongquan, *Untitled, New Photo-Ten Years*



The Chinese photographers in the collection — An Hong, Gao Bo, Guan Ce, Hong Lei, Jiang Zhi, Jin Yongquan, Liu Anping, Liu Zheng, Qiu Zhijie, Rong Rong, San Mao, Wang Xu, Yan Lei, Zhao Liang, Zheng Guogu, and Zhuang Hui—all played a seminal role in the history of Chinese experimental photography. Some demonstrate the gradual transition from photo-journalism to experimental photography, while others are more firmly planted in the realm of the experimental.

The Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies (FAPE), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing permanent works of American art for U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide, has contributed a significant outdoor sculpture, *NOW*, by Joel Shapiro and a selection of his prints for the interior. “The sculpture I proposed for the U.S. Consulate General in Guangzhou is a large, essentially abstract work but it has distinct figurative references,” Shapiro says. “The individual forms are simple but in concert they are unpredictable, complicated and engaging. The capacity for joyful play and free experimentation is universal and I think it transcends cultural boundaries. It is the very nature of art.”

Joel Shapiro's sculpture, *NOW*,  
at the Diplomatic entrance



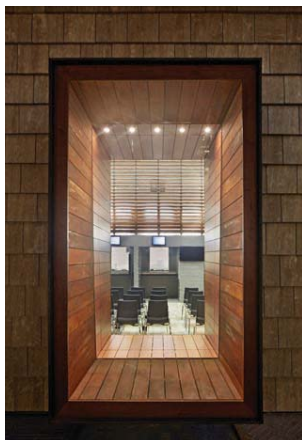


## CRAFT & SUSTAINABILITY

The compound's architectural ethos is formed around a clear commitment to environmental sustainability that includes the extensive use of local materials and with those materials a commitment to craft in their deployment. The Consulate Plaza is shaded by trees and manages storm water by means of riparian plants and bioswales that are indigenous to Guangdong Province, as is all the landscape. Its surface is a virtual encyclopedia of ancient, local paving materials and patterns organized to reinforce the architectural concept of connection between the Consulate's interior and exterior spaces and Guangzhou's public realm.

All roofs in the Consulate compound perform a dual role of solar heat rejection, reducing the compound's overall heat island effect and reducing the storm surge impact from torrential rains. The main Consulate building accomplishes this through its white "cool roof" and its integrated roof and wall which channel all rainwater directly into the compound's landscape. The Corten-clad auxiliary buildings are sheltered with green roofs which reject heat and detain storm surge rainwater, allowing it to slowly percolate into the landscape. This fundamental, climate-based, environmental mitigation extends to the architecture, allowing the high-efficiency interior lighting and systems to be even more impactful by first reducing loads. The green roofs sheltering the auxiliary buildings in public areas have extensive overhangs providing rain shelter and protection from the direct sun. Likewise, the windows within the main office building's soft-form shell are turned horizontally and carved deeply into the stone shell to minimize solar heat-gain through shading.





Clockwise from top left:

Building F Corten and glass wall system

Building B exterior features four different hand-selected shades of granite

Building F with bioswale in foreground

Corten-wrapped lantern boxes finished with teak-paneled interior

*"Our intentions were to represent American values while respecting Guangzhou's physical and cultural landscape. The aim was to create buildings and grounds that are environmentally sustainable through natural, climate-based design and respectful of Lingnan culture—avoiding monumentality and formality."*

Craig Hartman, FAIA, Design Partner, SOM



The main building's service and elevator core was placed on the west face to further reduce solar gain. The Consulate's east face is canted inward to capture the prevailing easterly breeze and shed it downward to cool the compound's principal outdoor gathering place; the Consulate plaza or courtyard. This canted form, coupled with deeply recessed horizontal windows, reduces heat gain from the high South China sun to almost zero. This strategy is also used at the building's ends, where the shell form extends to create deep horizontal and vertical shading. The deep set, horizontal windows in the Consulate work space are stacked vertically to provide views from both seated and standing positions and are staggered to distribute natural light within.

The complex was designed to meet the requirements of the Silver level of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) rating system for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings—a level now required of all new embassies and consulates.

Recessed fenestration and indigenous plantings keep the Consulate's indoor and outdoor spaces cooler



## A DIPLOMATIC WORKPLACE

The United States Consulate General is an important presence in this rapidly developing district of Guangzhou, the public face of the U.S. government's extensive activities in southern China, and a functional workspace for the Consulate General's more than 400 employees.

"There's an attention to the quality of life of the employees and to the zoning of the property, which can be challenging with many different functions on one site," Townsend says. "These different discrete areas flow into one another, and provide amenities for everyone."

The campus-like plan for the Consulate's seven buildings provides extensively landscaped gardens for the enjoyment of all workers within the secure perimeter of the facility. The American staff enjoys the same easy access to public transportation as the locals—the subway is located just across the street to the north. Limited parking within the complex encourages more environmentally-friendly commutes for staff, who are literally walking the walk of energy-efficient design and operations.

Safety and security are necessary considerations in today's global community. "This project has attempted to have a seamless relationship between the inside and the outside of the compound," Muniz says. "If the security elements of a project are well integrated, you don't immediately notice them," she adds. "This is a very approachable project—the scale and the detail are key."

Creating that sense of safety and security for American citizens living and working in a foreign culture while enhancing every opportunity for promoting relationships between the United States and China is the ultimate test of the architecture of diplomacy.

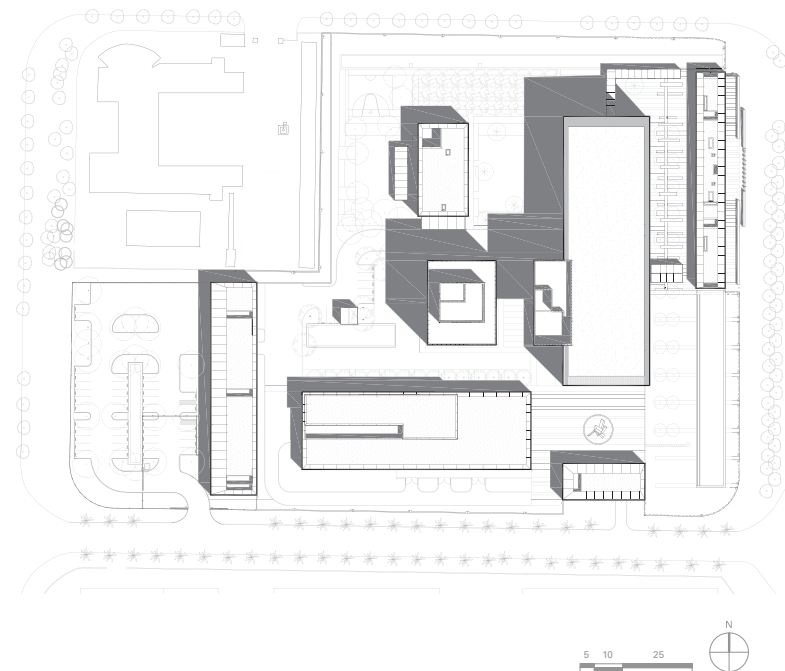
The Consulate's public space is open to the community, signifying and strengthening the bonds between the U.S. and China





*"The Guangdong province accounts for 12% of China's GDP and 25% of its international trade, and is home to major American corporations. Our new Consulate General is a first class facility that permits, for the first time, the full range of American diplomatic and commercial activities in this most important industrial sector of China."*

*Jaime Salcedo, Director  
Office of Special Projects Coordination, OBO*



Plan view of the Consulate campus





## PROJECT TEAM

OWNER  
U.S. Department of State,  
Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations

Lydia J. Muniz, Director,  
Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations

Casey Jones,  
Deputy Director

Joseph W. Toussaint, Managing Director,  
Program Development Coordination, and Support

Jaime Salcedo, Director,  
Office of Special Projects Coordination

David Shaeffer, Director of Security,  
Office of Special Projects Coordination

Phillip Louh,  
Project Director of Construction

Lloyd Myhre,  
Project Manager

Mark Flemming,  
Project Design Manager/Architect

Ezel Silver,  
Project Construction Executive

Charlie Krips,  
Project Contracts Administrator

Frank Alsop  
Michael Andrew  
Byron Bacik  
Sam Boyer  
Rebecca Clark  
Alain DeVergie  
Dean Devilla  
Martin Donnelly  
William Alex Douglas  
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Kyle Haines  
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Greg Reilly  
Andrew Remson  
Dena Richardson  
Glen Ross  
David Stobaugh  
Wade Taylor  
Carlos Valentin  
Doug Willey

ARCHITECT  
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP

CHINESE ARCHITECT & ENGINEERING FIRM  
GZDI—Guangzhou Design Institute

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING  
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP

CIVIL ENGINEERING  
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP

MEP ENGINEERING  
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP

SPECIFICATIONS  
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP

ENVIRONMENTAL GRAPHICS  
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT  
Tom Leader Studio

GEOTECHNICAL CONSULTANT  
Schnabel Engineering, LLC

FIRE/LIFE SAFETY  
Rolf Jensen & Associates

IT/TELECOMMUNICATIONS  
WSP – Flack + Kurtz

BLAST CONSULTANT  
Weidinger Associates

FOOD SERVICE  
Cini Little International, Inc.

VERTICAL TRANSPORTATION  
Edgett Williams Consulting Group, Inc.

LIGHTING  
Claude R. Engle Lighting Consultants PC

SITE LIGHTING  
Archiluce International Inc.

COST ESTIMATION  
Project Cost Government Service, LLC

ACOUSTICS  
Cerami & Associates

AUDIO VISUAL  
Shen Milsom Wilke LLC

SYSTEMS FURNITURE INTEGRATION  
Maryland Office Interiors (MOI)

GENERAL CONTRACTORS  
BL Harbert International/  
China Huashi Enterprises CO., LTD

PROJECT FACTS

LOCATION

Guangzhou, Peoples Republic of China  
7.4-acre site in the new Central Business District adjacent to the Pearl River

PROGRAM SIZE

18,000 gross square meters including consular office buildings, service shops, a residence for U.S. Marines, a warehouse, entrance pavilions for consular applicants, visitors, and employees

TIME FRAME

Design Contract Award: July 2006  
Construction Start: May 2008  
Occupancy: July 2013

*“SOM did a fine job showing how great American architecture and great American innovation can represent the aspirational values of the country and our democracy. With this program, we hope to give American architects and engineers an opportunity to showcase their talents overseas.”*

*Christine Foushee,  
Director of External Affairs, OBO*

PROJECT SCOPE

Budget: \$267 million, design and construction  
Sustainability: Certified LEED® Silver  
Exhibition/meeting hall capacity: 150 visitors  
Consular processing: 67 service windows  
Employees: Over 400 U.S. and local staff  
Parking: 44 spaces for staff and visitors  
Landscape: Indigenous trees, flowering grasses

BUILDING FEATURES

Civil: Storm water filtration through four bio-basins  
Foundation system: Drilled concrete piles  
Structure: Reinforced concrete and steel frame  
Mechanical: Air cooled chillers; heat recovery  
Exterior finishes: hand set stone; plaster  
Interior public finishes: hand set stone; sustainably harvested teak; aluminum trim

ART

Permanent collection curated by  
Art in Embassies

Jennifer Steinkamp, *Orbit*  
Doug Aitken, *New Horizons*  
Bill Viola, *Old Oak*  
Jane Rosen, *Chinese Celadon*  
Mari Eastman, *Moonscape with Fo-dog*  
Yan Lei, *New Photo-Ten Years*  
Wang Xu, *Untitled*

Exterior sculpture by Joel Shapiro  
*NOW*, a gift of Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies

EXCELLENCE IN DIPLOMATIC FACILITIES  
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Concerned that the caliber of federal construction was declining, in 1962, President Kennedy convened an ad hoc committee to ensure that federal architecture continued to represent American ideals—from dignity, stability, and vigor to embodying the finest architecture of its time. That ad hoc committee set forth guiding principles for federal architecture, authored by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Those guiding principles are just as relevant today as they were over 50 years ago—although today they would very likely be expanded to include the importance of security, sustainability, and flexibility in our resource-constrained and rapidly changing world.

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO)—following in the footsteps of the General Services Administration (GSA) and the Design Excellence program it developed over 16 years ago—has renewed its commitment to excellence and implemented an Excellence program for U.S. embassy and consulate facilities. The Guiding Principles of this Department of State program, based on the 1962 Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture, are articulated below. The principles are the foundation of OBO's new Excellence initiative and are a conceptual road map to guide the work of each person and office in OBO as we pursue our mission to provide secure, safe, and functional facilities that represent the U.S. government to the host nation and support our staff in the achievement of U.S. foreign policy objectives. Delivering excellence is a comprehensive process

that seeks to utilize the best methods, technologies, and staff abilities. Each office, person, and action in OBO will contribute to the realization of this goal. If the Guiding Principles below are applied, OBO will produce facilities that are outstanding in all respects. OBO project teams are challenged to apply all of these principles, coordinate their efforts, and deliver built embassy and consulate complexes that represent the best of American architecture, engineering, technology, art, and culture.

PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

Embassies and consulates have two essential purposes: to be safe, secure, functional, and inspiring places for the conduct of diplomacy, and to physically represent the U.S. government to the host nation. A facility that represents the best of American architecture, design, engineering, and construction will be an appropriate workspace, contextually appropriate, and a respected landmark—representing the best of American government, enterprise, and culture—in the host nation.

SITE

The site and location of an embassy or consulate have practical as well as symbolic implications. OBO will develop sites that best represent the U.S. government and its goals, and enhance the conduct of diplomacy. Whenever possible, sites will be selected in urban areas, allowing U.S. embassies



and consulates to contribute to the civic and urban fabric of host cities. Special attention will be paid to the general ensemble of surrounding buildings, streets, and public spaces of which embassies and consulates will form a part.

#### DESIGN

The design of buildings and sites is a comprehensive process of understanding and balancing requirements and incorporating them into a thoughtfully conceived, cohesive, and inspiring whole. OBO will evaluate designs on the basis of their success in skillfully balancing requirements, and on how well the design represents the United States to the host nation. Designs are to be functionally simple and spatially flexible to meet changing needs and be enduring over time. An official embassy or consulate style will be avoided. Buildings are to be welcoming, while representing dignity, stability, innovation, humanity, and openness. Ostentation is not appropriate. Designs will be cost-effective, employing an economy of means and methods. Each design will be responsive to its context, to include the site, its surroundings, and the local culture and climate. The designs will make use of contextually appropriate and durable materials and incorporate the latest in security and safety features.

The grounds and landscaping will complement and engage the architecture, and together are to be conceived as an integrated whole. The grounds should be functional and representational spaces. They will be sustainable, include indigenous plantings, and incorporate existing site resources, such as mature trees, wherever possible.

#### ENGINEERING

The engineering of facilities will incorporate the most advanced methods, systems, technologies, and materials appropriate to the facility and local conditions, including the site, climate, natural hazards, security, and the practical reality of construction, operations, and maintenance in the host nation.

#### SAFETY AND SECURITY

The safety and security of staff and visitors is paramount. Designs and construction will meet or exceed all security and safety standards and specifications. Architects and engineers will be challenged to develop ever-improving methods, materials, and solutions and to thoughtfully integrate these into overall designs.

#### SUSTAINABILITY

Buildings and grounds will incorporate sustainable design and energy efficiency, and these features will be integrated into their design. Construction, maintenance, and operations practices will be sustainable. Particular attention will be given to the climate, context, and site conditions.

#### ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

OBO will hire leading American architects and engineers. Their selection will be based on the quality of their design achievements and portfolio of work. The selection methodology will be open, competitive, and transparent.

#### CONSTRUCTION AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

Construction professionals will be engaged throughout the process to ensure the best possible design and implementation. OBO is committed to using the best construction practices and craftsmanship possible and to selecting the most qualified building contractors with a record of delivering high quality projects.

#### OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

Operations and maintenance professionals will be engaged throughout the design and construction process for new construction and renovation projects. Buildings and sites will be economical to operate and maintain and will utilize equipment and materials that are durable, dependable, and suitable. Designs will be based on life-cycle analysis of options that take into account long-term operations and maintenance concerns. Design intent and features will be maintained throughout the life of the facility, using the best stewardship practices.

#### ART

Embassy and consulate buildings and grounds are an opportunity to showcase the best of American and host nation art and culture. OBO is committed to integrating art into its facilities such that each property will be both an individual expression of Excellence and part of a larger body of work representing the best that America's designers and artists can leave to later generations.

#### HISTORICALLY, ARCHITECTURALLY, OR CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT PROPERTIES AND COLLECTIONS

OBO is committed to preserving the Department's historical, cultural, and architectural legacy. The Secretary of State's Register of Culturally Significant Property is the official listing of important diplomatic architecture overseas and properties that figure prominently in our country's international heritage. OBO has established a world class stewardship program dedicated to the proper conservation and maintenance of the Department's culturally significant historical properties and assets.

